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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000479

SIPDIS

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TAGS: IR PGOV PHUM PREL

SUBJECT: IRAN: OPPOSITION DEFIES THREATS, DEMONSTRATES RESILIENCE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: One day after the November 4 official ceremony and 'Green Path' protests, Tehran and other Iranian cities where protests occurred were quiet. Based on reporting from several sources on the November 4 protests, it appears that protests were smaller in Tehran than on Qods Day, but that protests took place in more cities across the country. In Tehran, Iran's security forces confronted crowds, dispersing them with tear and pepper gas and baton attacks, and appeared to have been successful in preventing opposition crowds from gathering in any one location en masse. Protesters were on the streets, demonstrating their resilience despite the violence they encountered. The number of protests is hard to gauge, but regardless of the exact number of protesters, the 'Green Path' opposition at least demonstrated its ability to steal attention from the regime's staged demonstrations and to remain an irritant for the government. The question no longer seems to be if the opposition will be able to rally its supporters, but when its next opportunity to do so will be. The next official holiday likely to attract opposition protests are the religious holidays Ta'sua and Ashura on December 26 and 27. Students' Day on December 6 may also be a flashpoint, especially on university campuses. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) IRIG security forces seemed determined to prevent a repeat of the Qods Day crowds and to maintain their control over Tehran's streets. To do so the IRIG mobilized a massive security presence, with the IRGC, Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), Basij, and plain clothes personnel all reportedly on the streets in large numbers. (NOTE: The affiliation of the plain clothes personnel is unclear; security forces began using such forces during the summer protests and our contacts have noted that they are an effective tactic in creating fear among crowds of protesters. END NOTE.) The security forces confronted crowds, dispersing them with tear and pepper gas and baton attacks, and on at least one occasion firing weapons into the air, and appear to have been successful in preventing crowds from gathering in any one location en masse though their attempt to prevent University of Tehran students from leaving campus appear to have failed.

13. (C) Internet video shows security forces making some arrests although the number detained is unknown. A Western journalist based in the region said contacts inside Iran confirmed media reports that an Iranian AFP correspondent was arrested while

covering the street demonstrations. There are reports of many injuries as well; one woman applying for a visa in Dubai said her son had been hit in the head with a baton and another said her brother's leg was broken. However, there are as yet no reports of any deaths during the protests.

¶4. (C) Tehran, as expected, witnessed the largest protests and there were also protests in Rasht, Esfahan, Zahedan, Kermanshah, Tabriz, Mashhad, and Shiraz, though there is less known about the protests outside of Tehran. The protesters chanted slogans supporting opposition leaders Mehdi Karrubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, decrying Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, and asking if President Obama supports the people of Iran or its government. Opposition leader Mehdi Karrubi attempted to join a protest but was evacuated by supporters after security forces fired tear gas on his party. According to reformist press reports, security forces surrounded Mir Hossein Mousavi's residence, preventing him from leaving. There are no reports of former President Khatami's whereabouts during the day. Gauging the scale of the protests is difficult. Western media citing sources in Iran estimated that in total tens of thousands took to the streets in defiance of government threats, while others have estimated that at least a million joined protests in Iran.

¶5. (C), One prominent expatriate with strong ties to 'Green Path' oppositionists inside Iran told IRPO that he was pleased with yesterday's demonstrations, and that the 'Green Path' was contemplating even more substantive civil disobedience on their next event, Tasua'a and Ashura (December 26 and 27). (NOTE: We have not independently confirmed these statements. END NOTE) He also said:

- the Tehran crowd was 'more than one million;'

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- Green Path opposition leaders were pleased with protests in other cities, 'especially Tabriz, which has now joined the movement;'

- many slogans were directed against Supreme Leader Khamenei, and in some cases pictures of him were pulled down and trampled;

- regime security tactics were to prevent protesters from assembling, and as such 'Green Path' oppositionists changed their tactics, dispersing at the first threat of violence from security forces. As such, there were only approximately 300 people arrested, although many wounded; and,

- there were 'approximately 50 thousand' security forces mobilized in Tehran, many in plainclothes who sought to attack 'Green Path' protesters to demonstrate popular aversion to their cause.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Regardless of the exact number of protesters, at a minimum the opposition demonstrated its ability to steal attention from the regime's staged protests and remain an irritant for the government. The opposition showed its resilience and willingness to continue protesting despite the violence it encountered. The question no longer seems to be if

the opposition will be able to rally its supporters, but when it will do so again. The next official holiday likely to attract opposition protests are the religious holidays of Ta'sua and Ashura on December 26 and 27. Students' Day on December 6 may also be a flashpoint, especially on university campuses.

17. (C) COMMENT (CONT): Also notable is the lack of information coming out of Iran via Western media or otherwise. The arrest of the AFP reporter highlights the challenges of reporting from Tehran: Iran severely limited the ability of foreign media to cover events in Iran following this summer's protest and the loss of reporting from wire services, along with the ongoing closure of reformist website and papers, could further limit our understanding of events on the ground as they happen. END COMMENT.

EYRE